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For a generation or so, literary historians have been engaged in the fashionable pursuit of the pastoral. Along the way these critics have brought to bay some oddly-sorted practitioners of pastoral literature — Gide, Frost, and William Golding, for instance. But they have neglected a major poem that deserves at least a short chapter in the history of the genre: "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" by William Dunbar (1465?-1530?) the Scottish Chaucerian.[1]

It may at first seem odd to think of Dunbar as a pastoral poet. In his "Tretis" there are no shepherds, though he did write another shorter poem about a sheep.[2] Real crook-carrying sheep-herders have, paradoxically, never been part of the pastoral tradition. Even in Theocritus[3] the disputants are sweet-scented shepherds, costumed, as it were, by Fragonard; or they have disappeared altogether, their places being taken by personages from other walks of life. Two ingredients remain, in Theocritus as well as in Dunbar: the dialogue and the setting in idealized Nature. These form the irreducible core of pastoral poetry.

Dunbar's "Tretis," with its irreverent manipulation of pastoralism, might have rung the death-knell of this kind of poetry in English. But it did not — perhaps because *if* the pastoral "were ever lost as a tradition, it would presently be revived as an inspiration, equivocal and vain as it is."[4] The "Tretis" is a postlapsarian paradise of dainty pastoral (and other) devices — wickedly designed to ridicule the very tradition in which it was written. Despite Dunbar's attack, the pastoral survived, with its sentimentalities almost unchanged, not only through the English Renaissance but much later. Why so? One reason is the theory of continual rediscovery, mentioned above; the other is that the cultural flow between England and Scotland in the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance was one-way. The Southrons — the English — did not read Dunbar, even though he was the most gifted northern disciple of their most famous poet. Dunbar revered him as "noble Chaucer, of makaris [makers, i. e. poets] flour" in his "Lament for the Makaris."(60) But there was no complementary compliment: no Englishman gave Dunbar credit for using the "English" (i. e., Teutonic) alliterative line in his "Tretis." No Southron imitated, or could match, his brilliant aureate diction or his astonishing variety

of lyric forms. And there were no encomia of "olde Dunbar, floure of Northern Englisshe undefiled."

Dunbar's pastoralism is unique — a peculiarly effective mixture of the two essential ingredients, natural description and dialogue. His work is also uniquely important in any assessment of what can be done with the English pastoral. First, because it occurs first, let us examine the nature of Nature in the "Tretis." Dunbar combines two traditional views:

> ... the Nature, innocent and perfect, which was man's before the disaster in the garden, and the Nature to which he was afterwards reduced, limited, corrupted, death-bearing. Prelapsarian nature achieved its goodness and its pleasure naturally, without effort or strain. Postlapsarian nature, on the other hand, is in constant need of correctives — education, law, habit — inculcated rather than springing from within.[5]

Into this ambivalent Nature comes the Poet, who eavesdrops upon the three ladies. They complain about their husbands, past and present. The tensions and ironies are familiar: they are those of Shakespeare's comedies when, for instance, Touchstone complains about the underwashed Audrey while seated beneath the greenwood tree; or when Autolycus interjects his roguery into the rites of Perdita, that Queen of Curds and Cream, who is pranked up most goddess-like as Flora. We find similar incongruities in the bad verses of Orlando juxtaposed with the inanities and charms of three different pairs of shepherds: Silvius and Phoebe, William and Audrey, Ganymede and Aliena. Dunbar's poem shares this same wonderful greenwood-cum-obscenity — or Nature-and-naturalism. He also uses some other less familiar (non-Shakespearean) motifs: native Anglo-Saxon and Continental medieval conventions that give special resonances to his sophisticated verse.

To judge Dunbar's poetry, therefore, we must draw upon a broader tradition than that in which a poet like Nicholas Breton (for instance) worked.[6] Not only does the Scot have classical roots; there are also French ones (as contrasted with the Italian which dominated the poetry farther south), together with a number of other strains, some of them native. "Native" applies particularly and most significantly to the Anglo-Saxon alliterative line, the splendid sounds of which differentiate the "Tretis" from all other pastoral poetry.[7]

William Empson is the progenitor of modern pastoral studies. He

ignores Dunbar, along with many other significant poets, but one may nevertheless turn to him for guidance in determining the breadth of the genre and Dunbar's place in it. Empson's definitions are broad indeed, including as examples such disparate works as *Paradise Lost, The Beggar's Opera,* and *Alice In Wonderland.* In the first part of his famous study,[8] he stresses the proletarian message inherent in the genre. Later he ignores this sort of thing. He observes that the pastoral makes "simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody) in learned and fashionable language." He notes, then, that the quality of the poetry results from the "clash between style and theme," or, as I should like to describe Dunbar's technique, between the *locus amoenus* and the *dialogus obscoenus.*[9]

E. K. Chambers describes these two pastoral tonalities in a slightly different way:

> On the one hand, there is a body of poetry, transparent, sensuous, melodious, dealing with all the fresh and simple elements of life, fond of the picture and the story, rejoicing in love and youth, in the morning and the spring; on the other, a more complex note, a deeper thrill of passion, an affection for the sombre, the obscure, the intricate, alike in rhythm and thought, a verse frequent with reflections on birth and death, and their philosophies, a humor often cynical or pessimistic.[10]

Youth, morning, and spring are all in the opening of Dunbar's poem. The transparent, the sensuous, and the simple are absent — or, rather, they are adduced only for purposes of irony. I doubt if any readers find anything sombre (to continue the gloss on Chambers) in the three ladies' complaints about their husbands. The humor *is* cynical and pessimistic; however, we do not feel Death's chilling breath in Dunbar's Caledonian Arcadia.

A more comprehensive treatment of the genre, Marinelli's brilliant little *Pastoral,* gives us further guidance. The pastoral impulse is a "projection of our desires for simplicity."(p. 3) The reductive impetus in the "Tretis" is toward a more natural and therefore perhaps a simpler erotic experience.[11] But this may be pushing things: the difficulty with "simple" is the same encountered above with Chambers's definition. The simplicity in Dunbar is devilishly complex.

Marinelli continues (p. 8): pastorals are "all poems of the same formal type, 'mixed' poems of description and dialogue, part-narrative, part-dramatic, and usually but not always in either hex-

ameter or pentameter verse." Dunbar's "Tretis" is "mixed" in this sense. However, the long alliterative line is of course totally alien to the classical forms which Marinelli has in mind. Had the Scot been writing in London several generations later, he would probably have used the English equivalent of the classical heroic line, blank verse. The alliteration which he *did* choose derives from well-springs as noble and almost as venerable as are the models supplied by Theocritus and Virgil. Dunbar's line had been used for Anglo-Saxon epic poetry and later for heroic romances. We can never be sure that Dunbar was consciously using an "epic" measure to heighten his cynical distortion of the pastoral; we can only say that he achieves a brilliant effect by contrasting the lofty metre and the "low" matter. Nobody before or since has tried to combine the two in just the same way as did Dunbar; yet the two elements are perfect complements. As Marinelli concludes (in a different context, to be sure), "clearly, pastoral and epic imply each other continually." (p. 19)[12]

The two great themes of the pastoral (Marinelli continues on p. 20) are Time and Nature. Certainly the second is manifestly present in Dunbar's poem, not only in the *locus amoenus* preamble but also in things like the "natur"of line 174 — a reference to the husband's flaccid "lume."[13] On the other hand, the three ladies in the Middle Scots poem seem blithely unconcerned with the passage of time. To be sure, they all hope for a future in which their amorous activities will be more satisfying; but they have no sense of the past or of growing old. Here we may profitably contrast the reveries of the Wife of Bath: one of the most pathetic details in her Prologue is her awareness that

> The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;
> The bren, as best I kan, now moste I selle.[14]

Such a rueful sentiment is alien to the "Tretis." Perhaps Dunbar does hint at another familiar "time" *topos,* the *Carpe diem,* from earlier European literature, but he has nothing of the more melancholy *Ubi sunt* here.[15]

Dunbar may neglect the Time theme, but he makes another bold synthesis that is without precedent I think. He puts a Wife of Bath (the Wedo) into the *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Solomon, a landscape that also recalls the enclosed rose-garden of the *Roman de la Rose.* The Wedo is a trespasser in the paradise of the Song, but she has some

rights of easement (at the very least) in the French landscape of Guillaume and Jean. She, like Alison of Bath, is a descendant of La Vieille, the garrulous old woman in the *Roman;* her speeches also owe something to another personage from that poem, the jealous husband Le Jaloux.

By contrast Chaucer puts his oft-married webster into no setting at all: we know that she is on the road to Canterbury, of course, but the poet gives us no idea of the natural surroundings in which she reminisces about her past. Setting is not important. We are aware of the irony of her being on a holy pilgrimage while simultaneously looking for Husband Six. But lush landscape plays no part in Chaucer's ironies in the *Canterbury Tales.*

Elsewhere Chaucer does use natural description in the traditional pastoral fashion. After introductory material from the dream-vision convention, the *Parlement of Foules* continues:

> A gardyn saw I ful of blosmy bowes
> Upon a ryver, in a grene mede,
> Ther as swetnesse everemore inow is,
> With floures white, blewe, yelwe, and rede,
> And colde welle-stremes, nothyng dede,
> That swymmen ful of smale fishes lighte,
> With fynnes rede and skales sylver bryghte.
>
> On every bow the bryddes herde I synge,
> With voys of aungel in here armonye. (183-91)

Chaucer follows this with animals, music, and gods: Cupid together with a whole pantheon of allegorical beings, Wille, Pleasaunce, etc. Then there appears the Goddess Natura, surrounded by the birds on St Valentine's Day — details that Dunbar borrowed for the "Tretis." (60-63, 205-06)

Obviously Dunbar knew Chaucer's *Parlement* well. However, pastoral description in the "Tretis" plays a different role. Chaucer's is harmonious while Dunbar's is deliberately dissonant with the dialogue. The "Tretis" is *sui generis,* as we see once again, drawing upon English and classical traditions but adding to the mixture other conventions that make it peculiarly important and delightful. To these conventions I shall now turn — first to the Old French lyric devices that Dunbar employed in an unusual way.[16]

The *pastourelle,* the *chanson de mal mariée,* and what Bartsch

classifies as "Romanzen" are linked forms.[17] They customarily begin on a May or Midsummer morning with the poet riding out before dawn. Nature is burgeoning. The poet overhears the lament of a woman — an abandoned, love-lorn maiden; a shepherdess; a disappointed, ill-wed young wife. More often than not he listens to conversation (rather than monologue) — a debate or complaints from more than one speaker. The poems can be very sophisticated. Speaking of the *chanson de mal mariée* Voretzsch points out that though the matter is undoubtedly derived from the folk, the manner is artful.[18]

Sometimes the description of the *locus amoenus* is only sketched in the Old French forms from which Dunbar drew — as in this *chanson de mal mariée* (classified by Bartsch among his "Romanzen"):

> Pancis amerouzement
> de Tornai parti l'autrier.
> En un pre lons un destour
> vi trois dames ombroier,
> mariees de novel. (I. 21. 1-5)[19]

All three ladies wear green chaplets and the eldest has a green gown: green was the traditional emblematic color of fickleness.[20] The ladies are willing to take lovers since they have found their husbands inadequate. The eldest says that she would never have married at all if she had found a "leal ami."(26) Though this chanson is very spare, it clearly establishes the contrast between the natural beauty, both of the mead and of the ladies, and the naturalistic dialogue.

The *pastourelle* differs from these chansons only in cast of characters. It begins with the poet, usually a *chevalier,* riding forth into the greenwood; he overhears a shepherdess who is usually complaining about her lover or husband; sometimes he takes part in the dialogue, which concludes with his attempted seduction of the *pastoure,* but often he is only an eavesdropper. The connection of the *pastourelle* with the classical pastoral seems obvious, though some scholars think undemonstrable.[21] Virgil was the probable immediate source with Theocritus providing the ultimate exemplar in his *Idyll 27.* In it a lovers' conversation is overheard. The man puts his hands on her breasts ("I am fain to give thy ripe pippins their first lesson," Edmonds tr., p. 341). There is a seduction: she complains that she arrived a tiapdéros (maiden) but departed a yuvý (full-blown woman. p. 344)

These conventional situations had imitators before Dunbar. The Goliards, Walther von der Vogelweide, Adam de la Hale, and Dunbar's fellow-Scot Henryson all have connections with either the French or, less clearly, the classical pastoral models.[22] Middle English lyricists imitated the French too and Dunbar may well have known their work. The early (twelfth-century) *debat* "The Owl and the Nightingale" is narrated by a poet who eavesdrops from a "digele hale" (hidden nook) on a summer's day.[23] The narrator in a later poem hears the "strif" between a thrush and a nightingale.[24] Riding along he hears a "litel mai" (maiden) complaining. (Brown, No. 62)[25] By a bank he listens to a nightingale. (No. XXXIII in Chambers and Sidgwick) He overhears a debate between a clerk and a husbandman.[26] One ME poem includes the description of a "newe gardyn" where love-games are played. (Robbins, No. 21) The action of another takes place on Midsummer's Day (Robbins, No. 28); or the narrator, lying asleep in May, takes part in the dialogue rather than merely reporting what he hears. (Robbins, No. 179)

Dunbar's opening should now sound very familiar indeed:

> Apon the Midsummer evin, mirriest of nichtis,
> I muvit furth allane, neir as midnicht wes past .... (1-2)

Each detail has precedents, but the mixture is new and fresh. This "evin" is traditionally associated with love-making and the choice of mates. The poet moves forth, alone, before dawn. Dunbar could almost be translating from Old French and in turn faintly echoing the entire tradition, through medieval Latin back to Virgil and ultimately Theocritus.

He is now ready for his *locus amoenus*:[27]

> Besyd ane gudlie grein garth, full of gay flouris,
> Hegeit, of ane huge hicht, with hawthorne treis;
> Quhairon ane bird, on ane bransche, so birst out hir notis
> That never ane blythfullar bird was on the beuche harde:
> Quhat throw the sugarat sound of hir sang glaid,
> And throw the savour sanative of the sueit flouris,
> I drew in derne to the dyk to dirkin efter mirthis
> [lie in wait for anything amusing];
> The dew donkit the daill and dynnit the feulis
> [the dew dampened the dale and the birds made a din]. (3-10)

Poets usually employ this sort of setting to provide a lush, sensual

background for lush, sensual dialogue. But even in its earliest manifestations it could be used ironically — as for instance in Virgil's "Culex" where there is "a mixed forest of nine kinds of trees, a stretch of grass with eighteen kinds of flowers."(Curtius, p. 193) The hyperbole, as such, is amusing.

While Curtius found his earliest *locus amoenus* in Petronius, an earlier exemplar can be identified in Propertius:

> Sed procul inclusas audit ridere puellas,
> lucus ubi umbroso fecerat orbe nemus,
> Femineae loca clausa deae fontesque piandos,
> impune et nullis sacra retecta viris
> Devia puniceae velebant limina vittae.
> putris odorato luxerat igne casa,
> Populus et longis ornabat frondibus aedem,
> multaque cantantes umbra tegebat aves. (IV. ix. 23-30)[28]

Chaucer also probably uses "place" in a bawdy sense (for the pudendum) in *Thopas,* B 1910:[29] the entire *locus amoenus* (i. e., the agreeable place) is a set of symbols for the female organs and environs in one of the medieval Latin poems ascribed to the Goliards:

> Hec est vallis insignita,
> vallis rosis redimita,
> vallis flos convallium:
> inter valles vallis una,
> quam collaudit sol et luna,
> dulcis cantus avium.
> te collaudit philomena
> vallis dulcis et *amena* [italics added],
> vallis dans solatium.[30]

Dunbar has nothing exactly like this, but the precedent of bawdry in the midst of idealized landscape, firmly established here, makes it easier for us to understand the methods of the "Tretis."

C. S. Lewis has said of the "Tretis" that Dunbar "is playing a practical joke on the audience. That is the point of the beautifully idyllic opening which contains not the slightest hint of what is to follow."(p. 94) He is right about the joke but he underestimates Dunbar's subtlety and thus is wrong about the hints. They are actually very broad: the locale is a "gudlie grein garth, full of gay flouris" but the insistence upon its thorniness ("hawthorne ... hawthorne ... pykis

... thorne," 4, 14, 15) is clearly ominous. As one might expect, thorns and hawthorne had symbolic value in medieval iconography. "Thorns and thorn branches signify grief, tribulation, and sin."[31] Further, a red-blossomed hawthorne that grows in southern Europe [and in the British Isles too] is nicknamed "Spina Christi" or "Christ's Thorn."[32]

The ladies themselves are all in "glaid hewis" (20); more specifically they, like the three new brides in the *chanson* quoted above, are dressed in ominous green, symbol of infidelity: "Thair mantillis grein war as the gress that grew in May sessoun."(24) They are compared with both "lillies"(28) and the "new spynist [blown, opened out] rose." (29) It is a commonplace that the lily and the rose (especially that without thorns) are Mary's flowers. In retrospect we can clearly see the ironic function of these allusions. No blessed virgins these three!

The Blessed Virgin is also represented in medieval art by the enclosed garden itself.(Ferguson, p. 95) Dunbar is careful to make clear that his *locus amoenus* is indeed *conclusus:* it is "hegeit, of ane huge hicht"(4) and the poet must force his way between the thorns, since he is "heildit" [held back, restrained] by hawthorn and "heynd [sheltering]" leaves.(14)

As we turn to the dialogue from the description of nature, from this vantage-point we can appreciate the powerful and bitter significance of thorn, lily, rose, and enclosed garden. Further to link the *locus amoenus* with the *dialogus obscoenus* Dunbar uses an ingenious device. In their "grein arbeir" the three ladies have set up "ane cumlie tabil"(34) on which are arranged "ryalle cowpis apon rawis full of ryche wynis.(35) Having brought these props on stage Dunbar can now punctuate each of the ladies' speeches with laughter and a round of drinks. The table also provides an arena smaller than the expansive "grein garth" — cosy, "indoors-y," artificial — for the intimate confessions of the three speakers, "as thai talk at the tabill of many taill sindry."(38) Despite their aristocratic pretensions these three are after all not much different from Dunbar's own "twa cummeris," those two drunken old gossips who also have a good deal to complain about.[33]

In the "Tretis" the conversation or debate characteristically deals with love. As often, Bacchus and Venus have joined forces. The three ladies begin to speak under the aegis (if he has one) of the God of Drink: they quaff the "wicht [strong] wyne."(39) When we reach the

end of section one, Bacchus appears again:

> Quhen that the semely had said her sentence to end,
> Then all thai leuch [laughed] apon loft with latis
> [manners] full mery,
> And raucht [reached] the cop round about full of riche
> wynis,
> And ralyeit [jested] long, or thai wald rest, with
> ryatus speche. (146-49)

The same occurs again after the second wife has finished:

> Thai drank and did away dule under derne [dark, secret]
> bewis;
> Thai swapit of [tossed off] the sueit wyne, thai
> swanquhit [swanwhite] of hewis. (242-43)

and after the Wedo's disquisition too:

> Than culit thai thair mouthis with confortable drinkis;
> And carpit [conversed] full cummerlik [comradely] with
> cop going round. (509-10)

But it is Venus rather than Bacchus who is the major tutelary deity in the "Tretis." She is mentioned by name in 127, 183, 200, 399, and 431. This last passage is particularly amusing. Like Alison of Bath this Wedo casts about for a future playfellow even while still in mourning for her late husband — and in "kirk":

> Ful oft I blenk [glance] by my buke, and blynis of
> [cease from] devotioun,
> To se quhat berne is best brand or bredest in schulderis,
> Or forgeit is maist forcely to furnyse a bancat [banquet]
> In Venus chalmer [Venus's chamber, the vulva]. (428-31)[34]

Despite this conduct we are inclined to sympathize with her, as we are with all the complainants in the pastoral and *mal mariée* poems. The Wedo and the Tua Mariit Wemen are, all three, shackled to enfeebled and incapable bed-partners. They need more manly men to satisfy their needs — to nourish their beauties and their passions.

The ladies' complaints take up most of the dialogue in the "Tretis." Their terms are often drawn from nature, thus joining the two major pastoral ingredients in yet another way. Alliteration under-

scores the invective:

> I have ane wallidrag [weakling], ane worme, ane auld
> wobat [caterpillar] carle [fellow],
> A waistit wolroun [boar], na worth bot wourdis to clatter;
> Ane bumbart [drone], ane dron bee, ane bag full of flewme
> [phlegm],
> Ane skabbit skarth [monster, cormorant], ane scorpioun,
> ane scutarde [shitter] behind;
> To see him scart [scratch] his awin skyn grit scunner
> [disgust] I think. (89-93)

Invective is a common product of pastoralism — "one of the ingredients in the developed bucolic tradition."(Rosenmeyer, p. 34)

Dunbar's inventiveness never flags. There is the continual but varied bombardment of invective from the three mal-married ladies; their sexual terms are just as varied, direct, and clear. Passages like the following have given the "Tretis" whatever notoriety it has:

> As birs of ane brym bair [bristles of a wild boar], his
> berd is als stif,
> Bot soft and soupill as the silk is his sary lume [tool].
> (95-96)[35]
> Ay quhen that caribald carll [monster man] wald clyme one my
> wambe,
> Than am I dangerus [disdainful] and daine and doure of my
> will;
> Yit leit I never that larbar [impotent one] my leggis ga
> betueene,
> To fyle my flesche, na fumyll me, without a fee gret;
> And thoght his pene [penis] purly me payis in bed,
> His purse pays richely in recompense efter. (131-36)
> Alse lang as he wes on loft [on top of me], I lukit on
> him never,
> Na leit never enter in my thoght that he my thing persit,
> Bot ay in mynd ane other man ymagynit that I haid. (388-90)

This last passage is not to be dismissed as merely another bit of bawdry. It is remarkable insight into a woman's fancy.

Despite Dunbar's sympathy for the Wedo here, he is still "outside" the poem, keeping himself isolated because he has swallowed the "harsh medicine of misogyny."[36] However, lest the "Tretis" end on too bitter a note he has his three women rise from their third round of drinks and pass the rest of the night "with danceis full noble, / Quhill

that the day did up daw, and dew donkit flouris". (511-12) To remind us perhaps of the great Rose tradition upon which he also draws, Dunbar calls his three ladies "ryall roisis" (523), reaffirming their dewy morning freshness and their aristocratic birth and demeanor. It is delicious irony.

Finally as a most unusual conclusion for his mocking pastoral Dunbar employs yet another medieval literary device, the *demandes d'amour,* the formal questions of love with which lords and ladies were supposed to amuse themselves:

> Ye auditoris most honorable, that eris has gevin
> Oneto this uncouth [strange] aventur, quhilk airly me happinnit;
> Of thir thre wantoun [gay, lascivious] wiffis, that I haif writtin heir,
> Quhilk wald ye waill [choose] to your wif, gif ye suld wed one? (527-30, the concluding lines)[37]

It is only a game after all. All rancor has disappeared. We delight in Dunbar's fertile invention and in his bold new synthesis of pastoralism and other conventions.

During the century or more following Dunbar's death it was, in the South anyway, as if he had never written. Englishmen turned to Italian and Latin models (not to the medieval French so much) and produced some slavishly sugary pastorals. One of the most successful of these pastiches is Nicholas Breton's "Phillida and Coridon" (1600). A glance at its beginning will show, by contrast, something of what Dunbar had accomplished:

> In the merry month of May
> In a morn by break of day
> Forth I walked by the woodside,
> Whenas May was in his pride.
> There I spiëd, All alone,
> Phillida and Coridon....[38]

He woos, she is reluctant. She sounds singularly unlike either of Dunbar's women or his widow:

> She said maids must kiss no man
> Till they did for good and all.

Despite this puritanical coyness their love is somehow consummated:

> And Phillida with garlands gay
> Was made the lady of the May.

Breton's poem is bloodless but brief. It is not really fair to put its limp-wristed couplets alongside the sinewy alliteration of Dunbar. But Breton and his kind held the day in England.

At the other extreme from Breton's brevity are William Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* (1613 and later). They are a melange of Tasso, Montemayor, and Fletcher, with general indebtedness to Chaucer and of course Spenser: swains love, often allegorically; there is a contrapuntal progress of Thetis and her court. Browne treats passions that are tender and homely, never obscene. But his work runs to 10,000 lines — an abundance that Greg (p. 136) generously characterizes as exhibiting "leisurely amplitude."

Obviously I think readers should prefer Dunbar's "Tretis" to Browne. But that is probably not the point: Browne looks ahead to Milton and perhaps to Donne ("The Bait") and Marvell. These Southrons are of course worthy in their own right of our critical attention. Theirs are simply different versions of the pastoral from Dunbar's vibrant *dialogus obscoenus* in *locus amoenus.*

The nymphs have departed (to recall Eliot's phrase) from "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," but we should not mind. The ribald conversation of these three Scottish ladies is much more entertaining than that of any nymphs I know, occurring as it does in the pastoral frame that Dunbar so carefully preserves.

NOTES

*A version of this paper was read at the Chaucer section of the Modern Language Association meeting in New York City. I should like to call the reader's attention to Roy Pearcy's first-rate article "The Genre of William Dunbar's *Tretis of the* Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," *Speculum,* 55 (1980), 58-74, in which he argues persuasively that the poem has much in common with the OF *judgement* genre. Professor Pearcy's article came to my attention too late for inclusion in my essay.

[1] All quotations are from *The Poems of William Dunbar,* ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1932). I shall refer hereafter to the poem as the "Tretis." "Chaucerian" is still a useful term, even though it irritates nationalists and other over-sensitive Scots. Dunbar does not slavishly imitate the English poet; yet without Chaucer he could not have written what he did. The question is briefly and fairly summarized in H. Harvey Wood, *Two Scots Chaucerians, Robert Henryson,*

William Dunbar (London, 1967), p. 8.

[2] "The Wowing of the King," pp. 51-53, in which the ultimately willing seductee is a lamb, a ewe-let.

[3] Citations are from *The Greek Bucolic Poets,* tr. J. M. Edmonds; Loeb Classical Library (London, 1928).

[4] Richard Cody, *The Landscape of the Mind: Pastoralism in Tasso's* Aminta *and Shakespeare's Early Comedies* (Oxford, 1969), p. 176 — the last words of this monograph. Another (minor) Scottish poet repeated or revived the conventional pastoral opening but with insipid hyperbole instead of Dunbar's élan. See "Off the Cherry and the Slae" by Alexander Montgomerie (1545?-1610) in Tom Scott. ed., *Late Medieval Scots Poetry* (London, 1967), pp. 167 ff., which begins "About ane bank quhair birdis on bewis / Ten thousand tymes thair nottis renewis."

[5] Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral;* Critical Idiom Series, ed. John V. Jump (London, 1971), p. 21.

[6] For Breton's place in the pastoral tradition see the conclusion of this article.

[7] In *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1954), p. 91, C. S. Lewis calls Dunbar's work "a triumph of fruitful obedience to conventions ... [a] minuet of conventions." Dunbar is "the accomplished master of one tradition that goes back to *Beowulf* and of another that goes back to the Troubadours." Francis Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib* (Columbus, O., 1944), calls the "Tretis" a classic (p. 41) and says that Dunbar "is as much a master of medieval genres as he is of meters." (p. 65) Lewis and Utley are almost the only non-Scots literary historians who recognize Dunbar's genius, though neither discusses the "Tretis" in the pastoral tradition.

[8] *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (New York, 1960). Thomas Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), like many other contemporary scholars considers Empson too latitudinarian, though he does admit that the older critic's "conception of the pastoral ... accommodates an ample spectrum of experiences and styles." (p. 6) Rosenmeyer confesses too that "in all probability a tidy definition of what is pastoral about the pastoral is beyond our reach." (p. 3)

[9] Empson, pp. 11-12. The term *locus amoenus* for the idealized landscape has been given currency by Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* tr. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1953), pp. 193-95 ff. A. D. Hope, *A Midsummer Eve's Dream: Variations on a Theme by William Dunbar* (Canberra, 1969), also points out the contrast between opening and body of the "Tretis." His study does not, however, deal with pastoralism. The three ladies are not the Edinburgh citizens they seem, says Hope: they are fays taking part in a fairy revel. See *The Year's Work in English Studies,* ed. Geoffrey Harlow *et al.* (London, 1972), pp. 138-39.

[10] *English Pastorals* (London, 1895), pp. xvii-xviii, quoted in Rosenmeyer, p. 10. Evidently Rosenmeyer does not recognize that this sombreness amidst pastoral beauty is the *Et in Arcadia ego* of Poussin, as analyzed by Erwin Panofsky, *"Et in*

Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, N. Y. 1955), pp. 295-320.

[11] Even in Theocritus there is abundant sensuality—for instance — in Idyll 2, 136 ff., where the speaker Simaetha tells of her seduction of the young athlete Delphis: ".... I that was so easy to win took him by the hand and made him to lie along the bed. Soon cheek upon cheek grew ripe, our faces waxed hotter, and lo! sweet whispers went and came. My prating shall not keep thee too long, good Moon: enough that all was one, enough that both desires were sped" (Edmonds tr., p. 37). In *The Greek Bucolic Poets* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 14, A. S. F. Gow translates the last phrase "we twain came to our desires." The achievement of mutual pleasure provides the climax for another Dunbar poem, "In Secreit Place," 61: "Quhill that thair myrthis met baythe in ane." For "myrthe" and "place" in sexual senses, see my *Chaucer's Bawdy* (New York, 1972), pp. 150-51, 157-58.

[12] James Kinsley ed., *William Dunbar, Poems* (Oxford, 1958), p. xviii, says, "The centre of the *Tretis* is the contrast between appearance and reality, between the idea world of courtly poetry and the 'spotted actuality' of the three women's minds and habits; and to this end a metrical form associated with high style and sophisticated matter is turned into the medium of coarse erotic reminiscence." The judgment betrayed in "spotted actuality" and "coarse" is a little prissy. Some of Dunbar's fellow-Scots have always found it difficult to appreciate his humor. But Kinsley's evaluation of the "centre" of the poem is perceptive. Utley, pp. 156, 215, discusses a couple of later poems about women and in alliterative form; one is perhaps of "Scots provenance" but neither combines the ingredients as does the "Tretis."

[13] For ME bawdy meanings of "nature" see *Chaucer's Bawdy,* p. 151.

[14] F. N. Robinson ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer;* 2nd ed. (Boston, 1957), D 477-78; all Chaucer citations are from this edition. Dunbar's "Tretis" naturally recalls Chaucer's Prologue for Dame Alice — despite Lewis's cautionary remark that "comparisons with the Wife of Bath's prologue are here, to my way of thinking, wide of the mark .... Chaucer creates a richly human personality; I do not think Dunbar is trying to do anything of the sort .... If you cannot relish a romp you had best leave this extravaganza alone; for it offers you no other kind of pleasure." (p. 94) "Romp" and "extravaganza" suggest that Lewis undervalued Dunbar's intelligence, but his judgments are a good corrective for those who wax too solemn about Dunbar or about pastoral poetry generally. Wood, pp. 28-29, thinks that the "Tretis" would have shocked the author of the Wife of Bath's Prologue. He calls Dunbar's naturalism "bestiality." (p. 29) Janet M. Smith, *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature* (Edinburgh, 1934), p. 38, admits that though there are French parallels (which I treat below) to the "Tretis" it "certainly owes not a little to Chaucer's Wife of Bath."

[15] Dunbar *is* the author of the second-best *Ubi sunt* poem (not pastoral in any sense of course) in all literature. His "Lament for the Makaris" with its refrain "Timor mortis conturbat me" is only imperceptibly inferior to Villon's "Ou sont les neiges d'antan."

[16] This is not of course to belie his powerful individuality — something insisted upon by critics like G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature* (London, 1919), p. 14, *et*

Passim. In his old-fashioned *Les E'cossais en France, les francais in E'cosse* (Paris, 1892), Francisque Michel examines at great length the cultural and political ties between the two countries and concludes (I:300) that Dunbar must have studied in France, but there is no evidence for his conjecture.

[17] *Altfranzö*sische Romanzen und Pastourellen, ed. Karl Bartsch (Leipzig, 1870); all OF citations are from this anthology.

[18] Carl Voretzsch, *Einfuhrü*ng in das Studium der altfranzösischen Literatur; 2nd ed. (Halle, 1913), p. 165. He says the subject-matter is "zweiffellos volkstümlich," the form "ziemlich kunstlich." More recent historians are less certain about the "folk" material, having found that the "singing, dancing throng" theories of the last century, which relied upon group-composition to account for much anonymous European literature, do not always hold up under scrutiny.

[19] "Deep in amorous thought, / I rode out from Tournai the other day. / In a mead near a path / I saw three ladies shading themselves, / Newly-married brides."(my translation)

[20] *Chaucer's Bawdy,* s. v. "blew," p. 44.

[21] The romanists seem unable to decide whether the *pastourelle* derives from folk-poetry or -ritual or from antiquity. The most authoritative answer is probably still that of Edmond Faral, 'La Pastourelle," *Romania,* 49 (1923), 259: "... si, quant à l'esprit, nos poètes sont fort eloignées de Virgile, ils ont subi fortement l'influence de sa technique" (although, as far as the spirit goes, our poets are far removed from Virgil, they are still very much under the influence of his technique). On the other hand, Rosenmeyer (p. 8) says, "... on the whole it is agreed that the *pastourelle* is a specifically medieval genre, and should not be linked too closely with the ancient pastoral." Marinelli (p. 60) takes a more positive tack: he sees the *pastourelle* as extremely important as the medium for introducing the aristocratic point of view into the pastoral tradition. In any event Dunbar knew these OF forms and imitated them in his "Tretis."

[22] Walter W. Greg, *Pastoral Poetry & Pastoral Drama* (New York, 1959; orig. publ. 1905), pp. 63 ff. There were Italian *pastourelles* (as Cody, p. 48, points out) but Dunbar probably did not know them. Greg did not find much influence on English poetry from any pastorals other than the Italian. He does not mention Dunbar.

[23] *Early Middle English Verse and Prose,* ed. J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers (Oxford, 1966), No. 1.

[24] *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century,* ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford, 1932), No. 52.

[25] A similar lyric is No. XXVII in *Early English Lyrics: Amorous, Divine, Moral and Trivial,* ed. E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick (London, 1966; orig. publ. 1907). Helen E. Sandison, *The Chanson d'Aventure in Middle English;* Bryn Mawr

Monographs 12 (Bryn Mawr, Pa., 1913), connects this poem with the OF tradition. Froissart (Bartsch, III. 54) easily adapts the French form to a new locale: "Entre Eltem [Eltham, in Kent] et Wesmoustier [Westminster], / en une belle praerie, / cuesi [I perceived] pastoureaus avant hier."

[26] *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries,* ed. Rossell H. Robbins (Oxford, 1952), No. 181. One is reminded of the medieval Latin "De Phillide et Flora" in which the two ("ambae virgines et ambae reginae") debate the merits of their lovers, a clerk and a knight. See *The Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes,* ed. Thomas Wright (New York, 1968; orig. publ. 1841), pp. 258-67. It was translated during the 1590's, one version being attributed to Chapman.

[27] Curtius, p. 195, says that the *locus* has "an independent rhetorico-poetical existence" as a trope. Its ingredients include "a beautiful, shaded natural site ... a tree (or several trees), a meadow, and a spring or brook. Birdsong and flowers may be added."

[28] "But far off he heard the laughter of cloistered maids, where a sacred grove made a dark encircling wood, the secret place of the Goddess of Women [The Bona Dea], with holy fountains and rites ne'er revealed to men save to their cost. Wreaths of purple veiled its portals far-withdrawn and a ruinous hovel shone with sweet fire of incense. A poplar decked the shrine with far-spread leaves, and its deep foliage shielded singing birds," in *Propertius,* tr. H. E. Butler; Loeb Classical Library (London, 1927). This example was identified by H. MacL. Currie, "Locus Amoenus," *CL,* 12 (1960), 94-95.

[29] *Chaucer's Bawdy,* pp. 157-58.

[30] "This vale exceeds all vales beside, / A vaunted vale, the valley's pride, / Where rose-bloom veils each alley; / Available to birds, a vale / Where sun and moon themselves regale / And longest love to dally; / The nightingales reveal thy worth, / Most valuable of vales on earth, / O sweet and pleasant valley": George F. Whicher's tr, from *The Goliard Poets: Medieval Latin Songs and Satires* (New York, 1949), pp. 188-89. Whicher accuses Helen Waddell of giving this poem an unjustifiably romantic reading in her *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics;* 4th ed. (London, 1942), pp. 254-55, but neither he nor Miss Waddell seems to recognize the *double entente* in the topographical details. "Birds" may, moreover, mean penises — as do Catullus's *passer* (sparrow) and modern Italian *uccellino* (little bird).

[31] George Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art* (New York, 1966), p. 38.

[32] "Ein rotblühender Hagedorn, der im südlichen Europa wächst, heisst 'Spina Christi,' 'Christusdorn', " Klementine Lipffert, *Symbol-Fibel: eine Hilfe zum Betrachten und Deuten mittelalterlicher Bildwerke* (Kassel, 1964), p. 56. Miss Lipffert agrees that the thorn is a symbol of sin.

[33] "The Twa Cummeris," p. 84 in Mackenzie's ed.

[34] Even as early as Theocritus the role of the gods had become almost purely ornamental or emblematic or both, as here. Venus is cheek-by-jowl with the medieval devils Mahowne and Belzebub (101 and 112 in the "Tretis"). Rosenmeyer says, "The divinity of the woodland creatures — Pan, Satyrs, and Nymphs — was never

anything more than a trope .... Where the traditional divinities — Aphrodite, Hermes, Apollo — appear, they tend to have the same function" (pp. 127-28). Latin, both classical and medieval, and Renaissance Christian pastorals are likely to take their deities more seriously, Rosenmeyer says.

[35] The unappetizing and bristly old husband of course recalls — and probably owes a debt to — Chaucer's January, *Merchant's Tale,* E 1826. Dunbar reaffirms this husband's harshness (his rough skin) in line 107.

[36] Renato Poggioli, "The Pastoral Self," *Daedalus,* 88 (1959), 699.

[37] Dunbar probably owed a general debt to French literary tradition for his *demandes d'amour* ending, but more specifically to Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale.* This potentially tragic story of deception and adultery ends happily, with forgiveness and liberality all round. Chaucer puts his concluding *demande* just as does Dunbar: "Lordynges, this question, thanne, wol I aske now, / Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?" (F 1621-22).

[38] In *Poetry of the English Renaissance, 1509-1660,* ed. J. W. Hebel and H. H. Hudson (New York, 1946), p. 165. The standard ed. is *The Works in Verse and Prose of Nicholas Breton,* ed. A. B. Grosart (London, 1879). Dunbar's strong qualities and shortcomings are well summed up in Kinsley, p. xix, "Throughout all his satiric catalogues, cataracts of abuse, and vertiginous flights of fancy beyond the middle earth, Dunbar never abandons craft to impulse. 'The people of Scotland,' says Sir Herbert Grierson, 'have never taken Dunbar to their hearts'; "he wants the natural touch." ' But he is their finest artist, if not their greatest poet."